

PERSONAL TRIBUTE TO THE ARCHBISHOP

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In late November 1937, the youngest Bishop in the Anglican Communion landed in one of its most problematic Dioceses. In late November 1979, the oldest Diocesan and longest serving Archbishop in the Anglican Communion went to his final home.

Between those two dates lie 42 years of unflinching, unflagging dedication to the service of God and man - by one of the most remarkable figures in the history of the modern church.

Alan John Knight accepted the call to become Bishop of Guyana precisely because he was told that it was a country and a Diocese of colossal difficulty - a place where his lot was likely to be one of fever, toil, sweat and tears.

All his life he believed that man matures by the measure of the challenges he meets; and he loved to misquote St. Paul to the effect that where perplexity does most abound there strength doth most abide.

Fittingly, he brought with him formidable gifts to match his herculean task. He had a lively and fertile intelligence; a sound and balanced judgement; a genius for untying administrative knots; learning both broad and deep; and a constitution extraordinarily robust.

These attractive attributes could have earned him great promotion in the hierarchies of state bringing him comfort and consequence. But he was more concerned with service than with status, with sanctity rather than with safety and so he put himself at the disposal of the financially afflicted church in Guyana.

Behind these talents which anyone who ran could read were others belonging to the realm of the spirit, nourished by centuries of christian experience; an unstinting self-discipline; a will of iron; a rich imagination and a deep spirituality.

The one thing that those who worked with the Archbishop would remember all their days was his self-discipline. A Knight he was by name -and a Knight he was by nature. In matters of high estate, in things of small degree, it was all the same; He was consistently and cheerfully in control of himself.

He would not have the minutest object about him removed from its accustomed place. He was never late for anything. He always did his homework, and he took thought for the morrow with enviable foresight. When he spoke he spoke with clarity and when he wrote, he wrote with precision.

His favourite saying - and one that caught my fancy as a boy was - "They that love the Lord and did not order their affairs give him more trouble than a legion of unrepentent sinners."

Discipline was the root of his strength and the power of his will was its fruit. He believed that more things were wrought in heaven and earth by the will than this world dreams of; and that it is men and women, under God, who make history - not the systems that contain them or the institutions that constrain them.

To be an effective instrument of Divine Providence a christian, the Archbishop used to say, had to have a will tested by opposition, purified by prayer, steeled by self denial and sustained by Grace,

No one who encountered the Archbishop either as an ally or as an antagonist, was in any doubt about his determination. He was courageous in espousing unfashionable causes, outspoken in the expression of his principles, uncompromising in their social and political application.

But he was a man of great christian charity: bearing no malice and harbouring no rancour against those who felt compelled to disagree with him.

Alan Knight believed that man cannot live by the present alone - he must have a sense of heritage too. He, therefore, respected both the study of history and the symbolism which links yesterday's experiences with today's perceptions. You must look back, he liked to tell students, but you must not be backward looking. And he was a fine example of the advice he gave. The past lived richly in him but he did not live regretfully in the past.



Because he understood the importance of symbolism in the life of a community, he encouraged the great rituals of the Catholic tradition to flourish in the church. And flourish they certainly did. Their colour, their drama and their ordered beauty greatly enriched the devotions of the faithful and deepened their feeling of continuity with christian men and women up and down the centuries.

As befits a man steeped in history, he did not fall for every fashionable breeze of new doctrine blowing through church or society. It was his wisdom to wait until a fresh enthusiasm had proved itself enduring, then he graciously brought it into the system.

Like so many who have a sense of the past, he also had a sensitivity to the future. He kept his eyes trained to discern the shape of things to come. He was a close student of political and international affairs. The rise of new figures and new movements fascinated him. He read carefully the writings of prophetic people. Sometimes he even entered the political arena himself.

But his concern with what was to come and his favourite way of preparing for it were shown by his passion for the education of the young. He contributed so much to the spirit and standards of education in this country that what they say of Sir Christopher Wren in St. Paul's Cathedral we could also say of him: "If you seek his monument just look around you."



In Ghana he had been a headmaster; in Guyana a schoolmaster he remained. For four decades Alan Knight ran a little school in his home, a school that one of his graduates has called "The Academy of Austin House". Today there are four generations of men, many of them prominent, some of them eminent, all of them grateful who can point to that school as the place where their feet were first set on the path of the greater usefulness to their fellows. They are his living monument for they remained to give power to his teaching. And such was the generosity of the man that most of them later on got their university careers at his personal expense. To them he gave five imperishable values: a love of God, a love of learning, the discipline of study, responsiveness to the needs of others and openness to the imagination.

It may come as a surprise to hear that the imagination played an important part in the life of one so thoroughly self-disciplined. Heartwarming proof of this was the amount of time he gave to children. Children gravitated gleefully to him and he had a knack, rare in grown-ups, of giving them his entire attention as well as of entering their world of make-belief and joining in the fun they poked at adults. He was never so relaxed as when he was with little ones. They seemed to take him back to the beginnings of things, to a world that was fresh and green where wishes were horses and even Bishops could ride.

Reading the classics of English and Russian literature was an activity at the very centre of his life, Dickens, Dostoyevsky were his

special favourites- No day was complete whether he was at Austin House, at a Lambeth Conference, on the sea or in the air until he picked up one of the great masters of literature and read some of their pages aloud. He once stunned a group of theological students when he told them that he had learned more about human nature from the pages of Charles Dickens than from all the heavy tomes of theology he had browsed.

Brother to his imagination was his great affection. He was at heart a deeply emotional man but he never let you know it when you met him face to face. When, however, he wrote you a letter at some important event in your life, whether sad or joyful, then he revealed how strong his affection really was. And he penned those letters with such beauty of language that they have become minor classics of their art in this century.

Guyana evoked from him, from the moment of his first arrival to the day of his death both imagination and affection. So much so that he was one of the first people after independence to become a son of the soil by adoption and grace. The coastal flatlands did not stir him much but the far stretches of the interior fired his soul to ecstasy. It was not that he loved Georgetown less, but that he loved the silent solitudes more. He used to tell his friends that he had two Cathedrals, this one made by human hands and another one not made by human hands, whose isles were the mighty rivers, whose pillars and arches were the tall spreading trees, whose stained glass windows were the sunsets and in whose ancient immensity he felt the presence of the spirit that moves upon the face of the deep.



In the magnificence of the sunsets on the southern Rupununi Savannah where soil and sky, sun and summit are all subsumed in a rich continuum of colour, where the whole created order becomes a beautifully woven tapestry of crimson, green, magenta, orange and gold, in these sunsets he saw continuing confirmation that man could walk with his God in the garden of the earth in the cool of the day.

All the long years of his labours in Guyana Alan Knight walked closely and humbly with his God. For 42 years his soul magnified the Lord, and no matter what perplexities were upon him his spirit continued to rejoice in God his Saviour. He was a man of enduring, incandescent faith, a faith that never wavered and a will that never failed.

It was his faith and will that kept him going for so long. In the last few years weary, wan and wasted in physique he soldiered on business as usual being his motto. And so he endured to the end. For these things, as for so many other things, he will be remembered.

When the lengthening shades across the landscape signify the coming of the evening and the soft staccato of the Angelus sounds across the silence summoning the faithful to meet the darkness with a poignant poetry of the Anglican Evensong people will remember him as he sang with potent joy his favourite Hymn "Praise My Soul The King of Heaven". And when they remember him they will do as we do now: Magnify the Lord for the radiant faithfulness of his unswerving servant.

MAY HE REST IN PEACE